

Why a Joint US-Pakistan Counterterrorism Task Force Is Necessary

By

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For more than 70 years, the world has avoided nuclear war. However, the nuclear order is changing dramatically. Pakistan's growing nuclear capabilities and ties to terrorist groups present an especially dangerous combination that the United States cannot afford to overlook. It is the world's fastest-growing nuclear state—with an estimated 170 nuclear weapons. Its military and intelligence service (ISI) maintain close connections to terrorist groups. Pakistan presents a complex challenge that demands urgent action. To address this challenge, the United States should establish a joint US-Pakistan counterterrorism task force to secure Pakistan's nuclear assets.

Instability and American Aid

Pakistan is not a stable country. There are concerns that the state may disintegrate. Its military and ISI are infiltrated by individuals linked to terrorist groups. Without focused American engagement, Pakistan's instability could lead to either the theft of a nuclear weapon by terrorists or the sabotage of a nuclear facility. Moreover, a long-running territorial dispute over Kashmir and cross-border terrorism could easily escalate into a conflict or nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

Pakistan gets a free ride. Between 1948 and 2016, it received over \$78.3 billion in US military and economic support. In return, it is duplicitous. Over half of this aid was allocated to counterterrorism efforts, yet Pakistan's military and the ISI continue supporting the Taliban and other extremists. The US annually provides Pakistan \$2 billion in military and economic aid without proper oversight. Of this amount, \$100 million is allocated to the Strategic Plans Division to help Pakistan secure its nuclear arsenal. Despite this assistance, Pakistan provides safe haven to dozens of terrorist organizations and their leadership. Its military's continued support for them increases the risk of a catastrophic nuclear attack by a proxy.

The Case for a Joint US-Pakistan Task Force

A joint US-Pakistan task force is necessary to enforce oversight, strengthen strategic ties, and provide a direct US role in securing Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. A formal framework will mitigate the risks of mismanagement or unauthorized access and maintain control over critical aspects of nuclear security. It will enhance collaboration between military and intelligence agencies, enabling both sides to identify and respond to emerging threats while leveraging their combined expertise in human intelligence and counterterrorism.

A joint task force will also enhance nuclear security through specialized training. American experts in nuclear security and cyber defense can provide essential training to Pakistani forces, strengthening their operational readiness and capability to protect nuclear sites. Both nations conduct regular nuclear security drills—often referred to as “Armageddon tests” to

assess vulnerabilities at nuclear sites. These drills help identify personnel weaknesses and prevent potential security breaches.

Deterrence, Sovereignty, and Regional Tensions

The presence of US military personnel in Pakistan will also serve as a powerful deterrent to terrorist organizations. US support in securing nuclear facilities reduces the probability of terrorist attempts to infiltrate and breach nuclear facilities or execute large-scale attacks. This cooperation also signals the seriousness of nuclear security in the region to potential adversaries.

Establishing an American military presence in Pakistan could be perceived as a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty. However, US involvement would be limited to advisory, intelligence, and technical support roles. This role would enable Pakistan to retain full control over its nuclear assets and security operations.

A US military presence in Pakistan could also escalate regional tensions—particularly with India. The two states have irreconcilable differences when it comes to Kashmir, and both sides believe they should control all of Kashmir, not just one part of it. An attack on civilians or military forces on either side of the line of control in Kashmir could easily escalate into a major conflict. However, the US can use diplomatic channels to ensure regional actors, including India, are aware of the task force's defensive nature. The task force aims to secure nuclear sites and combat terrorism, not alter the region's strategic balance.

Preventing Nuclear Catastrophe

The world cannot afford nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands. By establishing a Joint US-Pakistan task force, the US both protects global security and reaffirms its leadership in the fight against nuclear terrorism. This partnership strengthens nuclear safeguard, prevents nuclear theft, and stabilizes the region. The US must act now to ensure Pakistan's nuclear weapons are protected. Together, we can turn a potential crisis into a collaborative success. The time to act is now for a safer and more stable world.

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